

THE LOOKOUT

FALL 2021



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Bruce G. Paulsen, Esq.
Chairman, Board of Trustees

The Rev. Mark S. Nestlehatt
President & Executive Director

Frank McCormack
Editor & Senior Manager, Communications

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

The work of ministry and mission is often referred to as a calling as opposed to a job or role. With that in mind, what is the Seamen's Church Institute (SCI) being called to do at this present moment? And how are we responding to that call? This issue of The Lookout gets at the very heart of what it means to discern and embrace the call to serve. SCI has been leaning forward to accept the call to serve since the mid-19th century. Fast forward almost two hundred years and SCI is still answering the call to meet the needs of international seafarers and domestic mariners.



In these pages you will read stories of the myriad ways in which my colleagues are stepping into the breach to meet the crucial needs of mariners both near and far. For the past six months our team at SCI's International Seafarers' Center in the Port of New York & New Jersey has been working to get seafarers vaccinated against COVID-19. Many of these men and women are from the seafaring nations of the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and India—countries that initially had low supplies or limited access to effective vaccines to combat the pandemic. But during the past few months, the United States has vaccinated more international seafarers than any other country in the world. These key workers are fully cognizant of how being vaccinated increases their opportunities to continue crewing the ships that transport 90 percent of the goods we use to sustain our daily lives.

In America's heartland, our Ministry on the River chaplains and chaplain associates answered the call by responding to critical incidents and mariners in need during and in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida, which slammed into South Louisiana on August 29. Over the weeks that followed, SCI chaplains received requests from hundreds of mariners and maritime companies to provide support through Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) responses, vessel visits and debriefings, and phone or video calls. The work was exhausting. Our resources were spread thin. And yet, our chaplains endeavored to respond to every request for help.

One of the more unusual calls SCI responded to recently was to provide chaplains aboard the State University of New York Maritime College's training vessel, the EMPIRE STATE VI. During the span of eight weeks, three of our chaplains deployed aboard ship for extended service to support the 600 cadets and 100 crew members during their Summer Sea Term.

You will also find an interview with the Reverend Kempton D. Baldridge, who is retiring at year-end after eleven years of ministry with SCI serving mariners and training chaplain associates. Kempton was once asked by a mariner what kind of chaplain he was (I think the question was intended to identify denominational affiliation). Kempton responded, "I'm the best kind of chaplain, because I'm only here to serve you."

This issue arrives near the U.S. holiday of Thanksgiving, and I'm reminded of all the blessings I hold dear: my family, friends, SCI colleagues and board members, and each of you who support the Seamen's Church Institute and enable us to carry out our mission and calling to provide for the personal, professional, and spiritual well-being of all mariners. We could not succeed without your commitment and generosity. Thank you!

Most faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark".

The Reverend Mark S. Nestlehurst
President & Executive Director



Chaplains Innovate, Connect Seafarers to COVID-19 Vaccine

By SCI Chaplain Cora DiDomenico

In the beginning of 2021, as COVID-19 vaccines were becoming available, the process of vaccinating seafarers was not an easy task. And yet, Timothy Wong, director of Seamen's Church Institute's International Seafarers' Center, developed a seamless procedure for getting as many seafarers vaccinated as possible.

SCI's first group of seafarers was vaccinated on May 14, 2021. But the work began long before May. In early 2021, when it became evident that seafarers would qualify for vaccination in the United States at little to no cost, Tim identified helping seafarers access the COVID-19 vaccine as a vital task for serving them.

Seafarers calling at the Port of New York and New Jersey board their vessels from across the globe, and they hail from many different countries. Seafarers also represent a unique set of needs. Most seafarers whom SCI chaplains serve are only in port for 24 to 48 hours. In addition to that, many of their vessels only return to port a few times a year. And lastly, for seafarers to be able to leave their vessels to seek vaccination, they must secure a United States visa—a challenging task when faced with unexpected extended contracts and shortened embassy hours.

Given those factors, we knew we needed to find pharmacies that were ready, willing, and able to provide vaccines on short notice. Those pharmacies also needed to have the Johnson & Johnson single-dose vaccine in stock. While we occasionally encounter the need for a second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, most seafarers opt for the single dose from Johnson & Johnson.

SCI's opportunity to offer help in this area addresses a wider need as well. In many countries, vaccines are still difficult to secure.

without posing a heightened risk to the crew on board. The unique experiences of seafarers, along with the benefits of vaccination, encouraged SCI to take prompt action.

Port Newark's immediate resources were put to use. Tim began researching various vaccine sites and pharmacies. He developed relationships with doctors and pharmacists who could vaccinate seafarers on board their vessels in the event that most of the crew needed to be vaccinated or the seafarers lacked visas. Many companies also felt more comfortable having seafarers vaccinated on board to limit their potential exposure to COVID-19 in the outside world.

This, however, came at a cost to the vessel—sometimes thousands of dollars, paid to the pharmacists—which prompted us to look for more cost-effective options. In conjunction with the International Transport Workers' Federation, SCI was able to dedicate one of our vans to prioritizing seafarer transport to vaccination sites. This meant seafarers would be transported at no cost to the sites, and they would receive a free vaccine once there. Tim also made sure to prioritize the safety of the seafarers and SCI staff by increasing sanitization processes for our vehicles and strict mask-wearing policies.

To date, SCI has helped hundreds of seafarers from more than a dozen countries get the COVID-19 vaccine. We plan to continue to provide this vital service to all crews calling at our ports for the foreseeable future.

As the pandemic continues to be a large part of daily life around the world, many shipping companies and ship owners are moving toward requiring crews to be vaccinated so that crew changes can occur in a more predictable and timely manner. One of the biggest stressors seafarers faced in the early days of the pandemic was the inability to sign off from their vessels and return home, at times forcing them to extend their contracts well beyond a year. Thus, vaccination makes for more prompt crew changes. It also means seafarers can go ashore to shop for daily goods and take a much-needed mental health break away from their vessel



Timothy Wong

Ministry Through the Storm: Chaplaincy in the Aftermath of Hurricane Ida

By SCI Chaplain Tom Rhoades

Hurricane Ida's fast formation and force shocked shoreside support and crews alike in South Louisiana. In many places, communication failed, with family members and operation managers waiting in the blackness of the unknown.

As Ida slowly spun inland, entire fleets were scattered, ships tossed in the waves, towboats moved upriver with the surge while their wheels turned downriver for control. In some cases, barges hit boats and some vessels had to be left behind. Mariners had to jump from their vessels onto rising and falling barges. A few entered void tanks, then opened the hatches for air.



For mariners caught in Ida's wind field, time stood still. For some, major hurricane-force winds lasted six hours or more. They fought the driving wind and waves, knowing that the next barge collision could cause their vessel to capsize. And mariners know that only half of those who fall into the Lower Mississippi River on a calm day survive.

The stress was unspeakable, and the relief of hearing the good news that a colleague or loved one survived brought

forth a torrent of tears. Hardened mariners hugged one another and wept. When Ida was over, some mariners found themselves home hugging their wives, girlfriends, mothers, dads, and children, and uttering, "I can't believe I made it. I still can't believe it."

No one fully grasps this experience except those who survived it together. The intensity of Ida implanted itself into the lives of those who were on vessels during the storm. But their work continued after the storm too. Those whose vessels were damaged shifted onto other boats that didn't go through Ida, often keeping quiet like soldiers who return from a battle. Others stayed in the area, working to free boats and barges off the bank or to repair damaged vessels. The work is exhausting, but the river never stops and neither do these brave mariners.

After the storm, SCI chaplains had the chance to board vessels and visit shoreside facilities to talk about what happened. As we had the opportunity to visit with people, our chaplains helped mariners and shoreside support staff decompress by sharing their stories and allowing a little relief to enter their nervous system.

We would share with mariners that traumatic events cause real pressure in our brain and nervous system. Oftentimes, we don't realize the ways they can affect us. We can experience sleeplessness, anxiety, fear, confusion, frustration, and anger. If trauma really takes root, it can eventually cloud our judgment to the point that we cannot see any light and life. We lose sight of how much we are loved and how much we will be missed if we're gone. We cannot see that our lives are a blessing and not a curse.

In truth, we all need a little falling apart before we can be put back together again. In my Christian tradition, we call it "death and resurrection."

Most of us will survive Ida's long recovery just like we are surviving this pandemic. But for myself, I want to do more than survive. I want to thrive and allow God to use the unavoidable suffering in my life to make me stronger and more resilient and even healthier in my relationships and emotions.



To make the most of our experiences in life is to embrace them and the pain they cause, and to be real, so that we can avoid self-harm and respond to life in a way that is in our own best interest. To live in our own best interest is to cultivate strong relationships with our families, our shipmates, our shoreside support, and our friends. And to access the support of physicians and mental health professionals and the resources in Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) when we need them most.

In meetings with mariners after Ida, I often shared an excerpt from Psalm 107 as a prayer reflecting on the trauma of going through a storm. At one point, the psalmist writes, "Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress."

And that's my prayer going forward for our mariners who went through Ida—that they'd be delivered from the enduring distress of that event.

If you or someone you know is struggling with the wreckage that Ida left behind, know that SCI chaplains are always available. Our crisis number is **800.708.1998**, and you can email us at **wellness@seamenschurch.org**. We have close to forty chaplains and chaplain associates along our waterways. We're here for you. If you find yourself reliving that experience, being frustrated easily, feeling depressed or struggling in another way, we will help you get the support you need. SCI provides an anchor in the storm.

SCI Goes to Sea: Partnering with SUNY Maritime

By the Rev. Mark S. Nestlehutt

Are we built for this?" was the question that immediately came to mind.

I'd just received a phone call from Rear Admiral Michael Alfultis from the Maritime College of the State University of New York (SUNY Maritime) asking if the Seamen's Church Institute (SCI) could assist the maritime academy with its Summer Sea Term (SST), which had sailed from the campus at Fort Schuyler a week earlier. Cadets, some on their first ever sea term, were now at sea during a global pandemic, and dealing with the stress of COVID-19, their upcoming USCG licensing exams, and longer cruises. Admiral Alfultis had been notified there was a serious need to provide mental health support to both the crew and cadets onboard ship and wanted to know if SCI could provide these services aboard the college's training ship, the EMPIRE STATE VI, which was now underway and sailing to the Port of Charleston, South Carolina.

The good news was that, when I received the call, I was at SCI's Paducah facility and would be meeting later that morning with Senior River Chaplain Kempton Baldrige, as well as with Chaplain Tom Rhoades. Both are seasoned chaplains with sea time, Kempton having been a U.S. Navy chaplain and Tom having been a mariner on towboats prior to joining SCI. Standing on the dock at Ingram Marine's

Ohio River operation, I asked the question, "Do you feel this is something SCI can do? Can we staff this with just a week's notice?" Without hesitation, they both answered, "Absolutely." From the dock, I emailed the Admiral from my iPhone: "SCI will have Kempton Baldrige in Charleston by 5/14 and he will remain with the vessel to Ft. Lauderdale. We are working to arrange chaplains for additional legs of A and B cruises. Thanks for reaching out. - Mark"

So began a new and impactful chapter in SCI's long history of serving seafarers and the maritime community.

This was not the first time SCI had been to sea, but it had been decades since we deployed chaplains on merchant mariner vessels, and that was during wartime. Since World War II, however, SCI developed along the lines of other maritime ministries in ports around the globe in that we were staffed with chaplains who visited ships in port by day and then went home at day's end. In the 1990s, SCI expanded its ministry with a new type of chaplain that focused on river ministry, albeit still without extended deployments aboard vessels.

Chaplain Baldrige arrived in Charleston brimming with enthusiasm. He was thrilled to have the opportunity to sail with SUNY's cadets and to incorporate his experience from serving U.S. Marine Corps units aboard naval amphibious ships. Kempton made his way around the EMPIRE STATE, meeting with cadets and crew members, befriending the regimental officers, blessing the vessel from bow to stern, and providing divine worship on the sun deck on Sunday afternoons. And while sacramental ministry was not SCI's primary purpose aboard ship, when asked, Kempton celebrated the first recorded baptism of a cadet on board the EMPIRE STATE VI.





By the time I caught up with the ship in Port Everglades, Florida, our chaplain stores had been well-provisioned by Kempton, who had packed and brought aboard ship multiple copies of the Book of Common Prayer, New Testaments, Jewish prayer books, the Koran, and even Buddhist reflections—everything that was in the wheelhouse of a former Navy chaplain. I, in turn, arrived with a good camera, sunscreen, and an SCI chaplain's ballcap. Once aboard, I was given a safety tour of the ship by Third Mate Ryan "Luchs" Luchsinger. After leaving port with the assistance of two McAllister tugs—the TATE MCALLISTER and the EILEEN MCALLISTER—my next three days were spent checking in and meeting with cadets during their watch rotations, meals with the crew, and star shooting at sunset with retired Army officer Bob Brockman and his class of celestial navigation students. Each day's routine rarely changed—cadets cycled through their academic classes, stood their watch rotations, or participated on deck in seamanship training, with the same panoramic view of "water, water, everywhere."

The mood of the ship, however, changed dramatically on day four. As we sailed closer to Puerto Rico we followed a similar path to another merchant ship, the SS EL FARO, a U.S. merchant vessel that sank with all thirty-three crew members aboard after sailing into the path of Hurricane Joaquin in 2015. The EL FARO's Chief Engineer, Richard Pusatere, age 34, was a graduate of SUNY Maritime. And on this Trinity Sunday, 30 May 2021, at 0807, the EMPIRE STATE's Master, Morgan McManus, slowed the vessel as it passed over the site of the EL FARO's last location, and Cadet Chief Engineer Cassidy Gay dropped a wreath into the sea in memory of Chief Engineer Pusatere and the thirty-two others who died in what had been the deadliest

American maritime accident in more than a generation. A poignant reminder of the inherent risk of a life spent at sea.

Safely docked in San Juan, Puerto Rico, I was relieved by Chaplain Tom Rhoades who accompanied the ship on the return voyage from Puerto Rico to Fort Schuyler. Tom's primary focus was on presenting the concept of whole mariner wellness and the need to develop resilience skills in order to maintain a healthy mind, body, and spirit while at sea. Working with Mate James Spear, Tom entered the ship's classrooms and met with groups of cadets to help them better understand mariner wellness—using your resources, and the resources available to you, to take care of yourself. Tom had the longest of the three legs and described the TS EMPIRE STATE's return to New York City, with the flotilla of welcoming vessels and fire-fighting boats, as one of the highlights of his life.

All three of SCI's chaplains returned from Summer Sea Term with a profound appreciation for the cadets at SUNY Maritime. We were struck by their maturity, their dedication, and their focus on accomplishing their goals. Over the course of eight weeks, we discovered that at least half of SUNY Maritime's student body hails from Long Island. We met cadets who'd worked in the inland barge industry and hoped to return after graduation; cadets who planned on blue water careers; and other cadets who thought they might not sail on their license but move into brokering or other shoreside careers. And we witnessed the dedication of the crew and instructors—including retired masters and captains such as Logan Philips, Richard Fitzgerald, and Bob Brockman—who were compelled through their own experiences in the industry to invest in the education and training of these cadets.

Continued **EMPIRE STATE**, page 13

Ministry of Presence: Kempton Baldrige Reflects on 11 Years as a River Chaplain

By Frank McCormack

Chaplains with the Seamen's Church Institute (SCI) have long dedicated themselves to a "ministry of presence," which Henri Nouwen defined as "to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell your own, and to let them know with words, handshakes, and hugs that you do not simply like them, but truly love them."

For eleven years now, the Rev. Kempton D. Baldrige, SCI's Senior River Chaplain, has personified this ministry of presence on the nation's inland waterways as he's served mariners aboard towboats, their families at home, and shoreside personnel.

Speaking at SCI's 43rd annual Silver Bell Awards Dinner in October 2021, Baldrige described a recent week in his chaplain ministry:

On Monday, a canoer who'd been caught on the river in severe weather and rescued by a towboat crew came by to visit. The same day, a former mariner who was homeless and had recently been through rehab stopped to ask for help getting a TWIC card. By the end of the day, the same captain who'd rescued the canoer had hired both.

On Tuesday, a new captain aboard a lineboat emailed to ask if Baldrige would come aboard the following day to visit the crew. The previous captain had died of COVID-19 just three weeks prior.

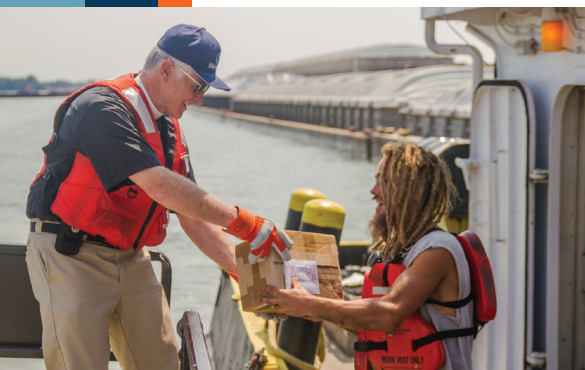
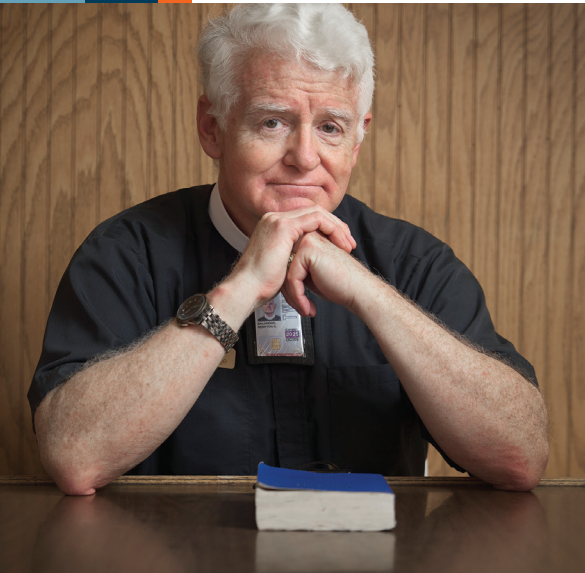
On Wednesday, Baldrige rode along with the mariners until their 10 a.m. crew change, taking photos for the late captain's family.

Thursday, Baldrige received a call from a port captain requesting a crisis intervention for a deckhand going through a difficult divorce. He met the deckhand, sat and listened to him until evening, and then brought him to shore "to begin to find his way forward."

That Friday, Baldrige received another call for crisis intervention, this time for a crew that had found the remains of a missing person. The crew had made a similar discovery just a few weeks before.

"I was bone tired when I got home that night, yet gratified to know SCI's ministry had made a difference in mariners' lives that week," Baldrige said. "I've totaled it up. By the time I retire December 31, I will have logged 598 weeks just like that one."

A Connecticut native, Baldrige earned a Bachelor of Arts in history from The Citadel in 1978. While serving in the U.S. Army Reserve, Baldrige spent some years following his undergraduate studies working in education. He was at Fairfield University from 1982 to 1985, serving as the director of corporate & foundation relations and, ultimately, as the head coach of the men's lacrosse team.



It was during this period that Baldrige began to seriously consider what he wanted to do with the rest of his life. He had a God-given drive to help people, and through the encouragement of his pastor at the time, Baldrige applied to Yale University's Divinity School.

"I started seminary as a walk on," Baldrige said.



Baldrige speaks lovingly of his four years at Yale, which included time spent as a chaplain intern at the Yale New Haven Hospital. Part of what drove Baldrige to spend an extra year at Yale was the tragic loss he and his wife, Isabel, experienced in the death of their firstborn daughter, Anna.

"That was brutal, but it also led to a time of reflection," Baldrige said. "I knew I needed to do Clinical Pastoral Education, and I ended up doing my CPE at Yale New Haven Hospital, the very hospital where Anna died."

Baldrige and his wife went on to have two more children: a son, Kempton, born in 1987, and a daughter, Grace, born in 1990.

After graduating from Yale in 1988, Baldrige served in two Episcopal churches in South Carolina. Then, from 1993 to 1999, he was university vicar and associate rector of the Episcopal Campus Ministry at the University of Delaware.

From there, Baldrige moved to Waterloo, Belgium, where he was rector of All Saints' Episcopal Church from 1999 to 2010.

Throughout his career, Baldrige has been deployed several times as a Navy chaplain, including during Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm.

Reflecting on the path that led him, ultimately, to SCI in 2010, Baldrige offered a marine metaphor: "Rivers don't run straight, else they'd be called rapids."

During his eleven years with SCI, Baldrige has spearheaded Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) training and deployment, and grown the organization's chaplain associate program, all while spending two-thirds or more of his time onboard vessels. Besides arranged ride-alongs, Baldrige speaks fondly of how chaplain associates have, at times, engaged in "lock and dam ping pong," where a chaplain boards a vessel southbound through one lock, disembarks at the next lock down, then hops on the next northbound towboat.

"I think the record is 12 different boats in a single day," Baldrige said.

It's just one aspect of the "deckplate" ministry that's defined Baldrige's time as an SCI river chaplain.

That ministry of presence led Baldrige in August 2010 to a ship's cook named Tom Rhoades, who had requested a chaplain bring communion to his towboat while it was on dry dock. Eleven years later, that cook is now Baldrige's fellow SCI chaplain and more.

"Tom's more than a friend; he's a shipmate," Baldrige said. "He's the younger brother I never got to have."

Rhoades is swift to reflect that sentiment back to Baldrige.

"If 'ministry of presence' is loving people and faithfully walking alongside them through their ups and downs, then Chaplain Baldrige has succeeded with me, and I'm changed because of it," Rhoades said. "And I know there are many others in the maritime industry who would say the same."

Baldrige said that's what chaplaincy is all about.

"You get in the mud," he said. "You go where the people are. That's what we try to do. Waiting for people to come to you, you've got a long wait. Not that people don't seek us out, but we've got to earn the right."

Now, on the cusp of retiring as SCI's Senior River Chaplain, Baldrige said he's looking to the future, which he hopes will include becoming a certified CISM instructor and working toward establishing a residential maritime chaplain school. As with all things—and especially in light of the pandemic—Baldrige said he's holding those plans loosely and waiting for what God has in store.

"Mann tracht un Gott lacht," Baldrige said, quoting a Yiddish proverb. "Man plans and God laughs."

Rich du Moulin Receives Silver Bell Award

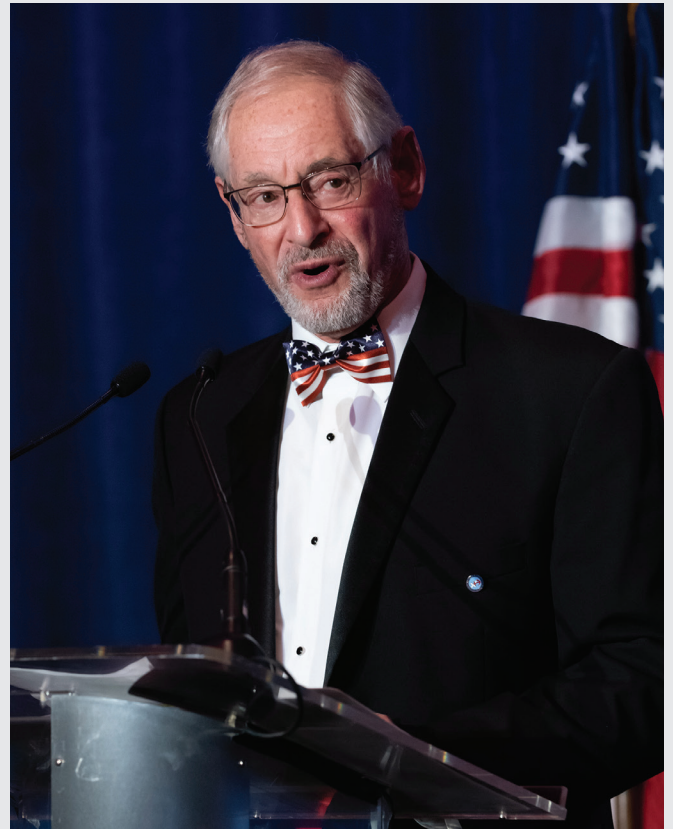
In a joyful return to an in-person Silver Bell Awards Dinner, Seamen's Church Institute supporters gathered at Pier Sixty in Manhattan in October to honor Rich du Moulin, former Chair of SCI's Board of Trustees and past INTERTANKO president, who received the Silver Bell Award. After a one-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 400 guests gathered for the traditional blessing of the fleet and the awards dinner that followed, which also recognized Senior River Chaplain, the Rev. Kempton D. Baldrige, who retires at year's end.

In receiving the Silver Bell Award, du Moulin, a longtime SCI board member, began his speech by apologizing in advance.

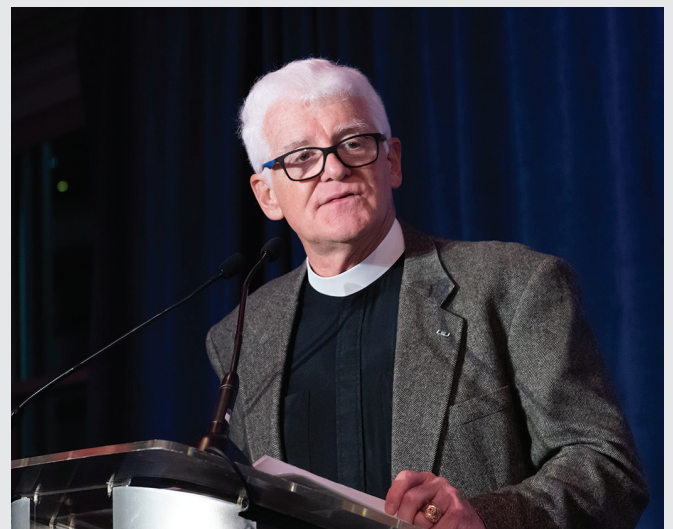
"My remarks tonight are going to sound like an Academy Award speech as I thank everyone who helped me finally get an Oscar," du Moulin said.

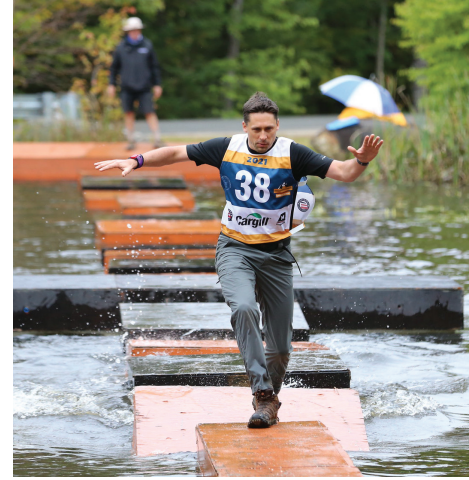
He then thanked the people he felt were key to the success of the events and efforts with which he is most associated at SCI: the Silver Bell Awards Dinner, the SCI Mountain Challenge, and the campaigns to fund the simulator renovations at the Centers for Maritime Education in Houston and Paducah. He also recognized retired trustee Charlie Robertson who passed away last year. Roberts was "a close sailing and family friend, and a great supporter of all my fundraising efforts for SCI," du Moulin said. "As a trustee, Charlie headed up our efforts to establish our Center for Maritime Education in Paducah."

After thanking SCI's past and present trustees, key staff members past and present, and his former executive directors, du Moulin recalled how he first came to know of SCI.



"I have loved SCI since I was eight years old, when my dad took me to the old SCI building at Whitehall to get a haircut, eat lunch, see ship models, and look up at the Titanic memorial on the roof," he said. "I am passionate about the mission of SCI and the people who deliver it. I am proud that SCI now helps mariners both on the blue water and on the inland rivers. I am grateful to all of you here tonight for your generous support of SCI."





SCI Mountain Challenge 2021 Draws Big Crowd to Maine

The Seamen's Church Institute had an exciting start to the month of October with 115 representatives from across the maritime industry gathering in Newry, Maine, for two competitive days of hiking and canoeing as part of SCI Mountain Challenge 2021. Those competitors, grouped into 38 teams, battled the elements and pushed themselves to their physical limits, hiking between 26 and 30 miles, depending on skill level, and canoeing a 5.36-mile stretch of the Ellis River.

And it was all for a great cause—supporting SCI's mission to mariners and seafarers. For the competitors tackling the course, the physically-demanding ascents and exposure to unpredictable weather conditions proved emblematic of the daily work of professional mariners, who face many hardships with determination and professionalism as they transport the cargos that feed, serve and power our world.

On the advanced course, top honors in terms of course time plus philanthropy went to the team from Core Transport, followed by the River Pirates team from McAllister Towing and the OFM Mountaineers team. On the intermediate course, the team from Bernhard Schulte claimed first place in course time plus philanthropy, followed by teams from

Cargill and Eagle Shipping. For a complete list of results, visit scimountainchallenge.com.

Funds raised directly support SCI's mariner support services, which include chaplain visits to thousands of vessels each year in the Port of New York and New Jersey, along the nation's inland waterways and on the Gulf Coast; hospitality and transportation services at the International Seafarers' Center in Port Newark; legal advocacy for all mariners; crisis intervention visits and suicide awareness and prevention training; and simulator-based and training services at SCI's Centers for Maritime Education in Paducah, Ky., and Houston.



EMPIRE STATE, from page 9

What else did we learn? Well, we now better understand that, while it was Admiral Alftutis who reached out to SCI for assistance, it is incumbent upon SCI to deepen its relationships with the cadets of SUNY Maritime, as well as with the midshipmen of the United States Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, and the cadets at Mass Maritime, Maine Maritime, Texas A&M, and Cal Maritime. These academies are producing the future leaders of the maritime industry, and SCI's mission of advocating for the personal, professional, and spiritual well-being of all mariners continues with this next generation as they become licensed mates, engineers, and masters.

The good news for SCI and for SUNY Maritime is that this partnership will continue for Summer Sea Term 2022, which should be the final cruise of the EMPIRE STATE VI, as the school looks to take possession of hull number one of the next generation of maritime training vessels. That ship, of course, will be named the EMPIRE STATE VII, and we hope SCI's chaplains will be called to serve on her inaugural Summer Sea Term cruise as well.

In retrospect, and in answer to my own question, I think that SCI is definitely built for this.



Ryan Libhart Pereyda is Principal and CEO of Patriot Contract Services LLC, a United States government contractor and commercial owner that currently manages seven Ready Reserve Force (RRF) ships for the U.S. Maritime Administration and eight Watson class Large Medium Speed Roll-On/Roll-Off vessels for the U.S. Navy's Military Sealift Command. The company also owns a shallow draft tanker and operates another for Schuyler Line Navigation Company.

Mr. Pereyda is a California Maritime Academy graduate and previously held positions of increasing responsibility with APL and Eagle Bulk Shipping. He has a strong background in the commercial maritime industry and deep technical knowledge, including a Master of Science degree in electrical engineering from RWTH Aachen Technical University in Aachen, Germany.

Mr. Pereyda and Patriot Contract Services are based out of Concord, Calif.

SCI: Who are some important mentors and role models that have had an impact on you personally or professionally?

Pereyda: Family is hugely influential and such an important piece of who we are and what guides and shapes our futures. My grandmother helped raise me and instilled the values of hard work—"you only get what you put into it"—along with a strong "can-do" attitude. No matter what the trials and tribulations may have been, she never gave up on those ideals and they have driven me to where I am today.

I could share a long list of mentors, as they have been so integral to me and my making it in this industry. Sailing onboard the Norwegian Cruise vessels as a young 2nd Engineer, I was inducted into the "Norwegian mafia" as the first among the Americans to join the Electrical Engineering department. The Chief Electrical Engineer, Malcolm Moe, was a hard-nosed man who gave nothing but tough love, but he also provided a path for me to challenge myself.

I consider myself to have caught the very tail end of what might be considered the "good ole days" in the industry, which exposed me to the "lean and mean" mentality. If a soldier went down, you were expected to step up. I received that promotion during my early

days at APL. Both Eric Mensing and Brian Constable supported me through my transition into upper management, for which I'm very grateful. They helped me to identify the opportunities available to me, while guiding me in how to face the challenges that would inevitably come with those opportunities.

SCI: What was your first leadership role? How has your view or style of leadership changed over time?

Pereyda: My first leadership role would likely be considered sailing onboard ocean-going vessels as a 3rd Assistant Engineer. It was scary at first but exhilarating to carry those responsibilities at such a young age. Stepping up the gangway of that ocean-going vessel seemed a steep mountain to climb at the time.

As for my change of leadership style over time, I think that's exactly it; having the ability to learn and knowing when you need to change and adapt.

SCI: Could you talk about the importance of company culture?

Pereyda: I believe that having a strong company culture is imperative in any industry, not just the maritime industry. Employees need to feel as though they are

part of the company's success. They should understand how, individually, they each impact our daily, monthly, and annual goals. Even during the COVID-19 outbreak and the subsequent work-from-home regime, things weren't easy, yet we managed to support each other and continue to work toward common goals.

SCI: What advice would you give someone who's just beginning a career in the marine industry?

Pereyda: I learned early on to never to miss an opportunity to keep my mouth closed and ears open. That didn't mean I didn't have an opinion, as that, of course, is highly valued. But learning to listen is a skill. Most people at all levels in an organization are willing to and want to share the knowledge this industry has bestowed on them. That knowledge is invaluable and readily available if you're engaged, excited, and willing to listen.

SCI: What do you look for in a candidate? What are some ways newcomers to the industry (or current maritime college students) can distinguish themselves?

Pereyda: Be prepared to work hard and be respectful of everyone. As a salty gentleman once told me when I was starting out, "Remember there are no easy jobs in shipping, not the agent, not the banker, not the ops guys and definitely not the cook or the captain. Everybody's putting in. Respect that." Hard work sounds simple, but a strong work ethic is essential in achieving your goals. For a college graduate or someone wanting to break into the maritime industry, I'd say be prepared for challenges, but with challenge comes a reward and a sense of genuine accomplishment.

SCI: Do you have a specific approach to challenges? How have challenges shaped you, your leadership style and your company?

Pereyda: It's important to identify the problem and then accept nothing less than a solution. Being solution-oriented helps to support the belief that there is an answer available and we just need to find it. We aren't going to be complacent. This works for both immediate situations and long-term problems.

SCI: What is the role of innovation in your work?

Pereyda: The maritime industry has rarely really been on the "cutting edge" in terms of innovation or technology. Our standards and processes are tried and true and haven't really changed much over my last 20-plus years in the industry. On the vessels, we rely heavily on our people. Their knowledge and skills are what makes each voyage a success. During the pandemic, we have certainly had to find new ways to make things work. Testing protocols, travel restrictions, and labor shortages have greatly impacted how we do business. But considering those and the present logistics challenges, we've been able to overcome and continue to succeed with little to no impact on our workforce.

While not necessarily an innovative concept, I'd like to see more women joining the maritime industry. I've recently had the pleasure of bringing Borianna Farrar in-house with Patriot as our Chief Legal Officer and Vice President. She is also the U.S. President of WISTA (Women's International Shipping & Trading Association). Borianna brings a tremendous amount of talent and knowledge to our organization. We also brought on Cindy Kumar, who has a wealth of financial experience, and she is blazing ahead as our new Vice President of Finance. Bringing women in our organization to 50 percent of the executive team is a Patriot goal, and we will continue to promote the inclusion of women in our industry.

SCI: What are your views of SCI and how individuals and companies can have a positive impact on their communities?

Pereyda: I learned of SCI in my early college days and have always found its mission to be a critical one. There are specific challenges, both professional and personal, that mariners face in this industry. I'm proud that Patriot can continue to support SCI in its mission, as I believe it is imperative that mariners have these types of outlets for support. Personally, as the CEO of Patriot, I feel I am responsible for finding similar ways to support our local community and families. Just like there are no easy jobs in shipping, there are no easy struggles in life, and we can all do our part to support our communities.



The Seamen's Church Institute
50 Broadway
26th Floor
New York, NY 10004



The Seamen's Church Institute advocates for the personal, professional, and spiritual well-being of merchant mariners around the world. Through our Center for Maritime Education, Center for Mariner Advocacy, Port Newark International Seafarers' Center, and Ministry on the River, SCI promotes the safety, dignity, and improved working and living conditions for the men and women who serve in the maritime workplace. Founded in 1834 and affiliated with the Episcopal Church, though nondenominational in terms of its trustees, staff, and service to mariners, SCI is the largest, most comprehensive mariners' service agency in North America.